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Subject: NIE-17 Probable Soviet Reactions to a  
Remilitarization of Western Germany

1. The Soviet leaders are probably convinced that if Western Germany should eventually attain a condition of complete remilitarization, and at the same time be in close alliance with the United States and the other members of NATO, the situation would present a grave threat to the security of the USSR and to the achievement of ultimate Soviet objectives. They doubtless recognize on the other hand that without the use of German manpower Western Europe can neither threaten Soviet security nor defend itself against Soviet attack. A rearmament of Western Germany to the extent now contemplated by the NATO powers, involving the creation of defensive forces only, would presumably not be considered by the USSR as menacing its security, but it would plainly render important Soviet objectives difficult and perhaps impossible of accomplishment.

2. It is unlikely that the Soviets believe that a program of Western German rearmament, once well under way, will stop short of complete remilitarization. They will have faith neither in the ability nor in the desire of the western powers to limit Germany to purely defensive forces. Indeed they may well conceive of the present plans for Western Germany as part of a larger US program, involving also the eventual rearmament of Japan, and ultimately directed towards a united attack by the capitalist countries upon the USSR as the citadel of Communism.

3. The creation of an effective Western German defensive force cannot be accomplished in less than two or three years; to build a strong offensive military establishment would take longer. In the meantime, taking advantage

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of the many basic conflicts in western opinion, the USSR will have available many courses of action which may, without provoking war, tend to dissolve the connections between Western Germany and the western powers, to weaken the cohesion and prevent the strengthening of NATO, and possibly to bring about a unification of Germany on Soviet terms. The immediate objective of the USSR in Europe will be to hinder and delay the progress of German rearmament, and to utilize the conflicts which the problem arouses in Western Europe to gain some ground toward its ultimate objective of a unified Germany under Soviet control.

4. In the Soviet program to accomplish this objective the most important element, on which indeed the general success of the program may well hinge, will be the propagation throughout Europe and the western world of a conviction that Western German rearmament will inevitably lead to war. Since many Germans and Western Europeans already hold this opinion, its further dissemination should not be difficult. The USSR has already made clear the seriousness with which it views Western German remilitarization — most recently in the Prague Declaration, in the note to the western powers asking for a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, and in the notes to France and Britain of 16 December. Meanwhile the European Communist parties have intensified their efforts, especially in Germany, to increase the fear of war and to point out that Germany will surely become a battleground in the conflict. Propaganda along these lines will doubtless be redoubled, and acts such as the increase of Soviet military forces in Eastern Germany and in the satellites may be used to reinforce the impression. Suiting their words to their audiences, the Communists will suggest that Western German rearmament will result in Western German aggression, or that it will become an instrument of US aggression, or even that it will so gravely threaten the USSR and its satellites as to force them to initiate a defensive war. The attempt

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will be to create a state of general alarm and despondency, in which more positive courses of Soviet action will have their best chances of success.

5. The positive policy which the Soviets now propose consists of a renewal of their earlier suggestions for peaceful re-establishment of German unity through the device of an all-German constituent council. With this the Soviets are seeking to provide an attractive alternative to the war and destruction which they predict if Western German rearmament goes forward. Against the background of apprehension induced by the rearmament program, this appeal to German desires for unity may well have a stronger impact now than formerly. The Grotewohl letter is designed to encourage both East and West Germans to take some initiative towards the achievement of unification, and to submit a common proposal to the consideration of the four occupying powers. The Soviets during the next months will urge not only upon the Western Germans, but upon the world, the reasonableness of their suggestions for German unity, and they will emphasize by contrast and with thinly veiled threats the inevitable consequences which will follow from a failure to settle the German problem "peacefully" at this time.

6. A major and increasing effort will also be made by the Soviets to cause division among the western powers, especially by exploiting the doubts and hesitations which German rearmament has already begun to produce among them. If a Council of Foreign Ministers is held, the USSR will use it to further this objective. The Soviets will play not only upon the French fear of general war but upon the French fear of German military force. Especially in view of the adverse effects which the Korean situation has had upon French confidence, it may well be that such arguments will be hard to resist. Even the British may find it hard to remain impervious to suggestions for a "peaceful" settlement.

7. If the methods of diplomacy and propaganda thus described prove

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insufficient to halt the rearmament of Western Germany, the Soviets will probably adopt more drastic measures, involving if necessary progressively greater risks of war. Provocative military and para-military demonstrations will doubtless then be employed, further advertising the seriousness with which the USSR views the problem. Such displays may take the form of ostentatious exhibitions of the military strength of Soviet and Bereitschaften forces, mass demonstrations of Communist youth and labor groups, etc. Outbreaks of violence in West Berlin and Western Germany may also be staged.

8. Western German militarization will be used by the USSR as "justification" for retaining and perhaps increasing its own forces in East Germany and in the other satellites. At the same time the remilitarization of Eastern Germany will be accelerated in order to increase the over-all strength of the Soviet bloc. Intensified harassing tactics in Berlin, designed to make the allied position difficult or untenable, could be represented as actions of the German Democratic Republic. The creation of a revolutionary situation in Berlin, and a renewal of the blockade, must be considered as possibilities. It is unlikely that the USSR will use overt military action against Western Germany until it is ready to accept the gravest risks of general war.

9. Finally, it is estimated that although the Soviets will first exhaust all other practicable means of preventing Western German remilitarization, they will seriously consider going to war whenever they become convinced that progress toward complete Western German rearmament, together with the rearmament of the NATO powers, and toward political solidarity between Western Germany and the western powers, has reached the point where it cannot be arrested by other methods.